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Version: 20081212

34th Commandant's Priorities

Our Marines and Sailors in combat are our number one priority.

With this in mind, we will focus on the following:

- Achieve victory in the Long War
- Right-size our Corps to achieve a 1:2 deployment-to-dwell ratio
- Provide our Nation a naval force that is fully prepared for employment as a MAGTF across the spectrum of conflict
- Reset and modernize to “be most ready when the Nation is least ready”
- Improve the quality of life for our Marines and our families
- Rededicate ourselves to our Core Values and warrior ethos
- Posture the Marine Corps for the future

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CMC Bullets

Version: 20081212

The following are excerpts from recent CMC speeches in which he discusses:

- This Generation of Marines
- Current Operations
- The Long War
- Transition
- Stress on the Force
- Our Families
- Grow the Force / Recruiting
- Long-term Security Concerns
- Value to the Nation
- Expeditionary Force / Naval Character
- Maritime Strategy
- Seabasing
- MV-22 Osprey
- EFV

This Generation of Marines

MS. COLLINS: Are you impressed with those men and women? Do they continue to impress you, you know, as many years as you've been doing this?

GEN. CONWAY: You know, years ago, a bunch of us with silver hair sat around and we worried some that this new generation of Marines might make good Marines — a new generation of youngsters, Americans — might make good Marines and soldiers. We have seen them in combat, and it's eye-watering. This is a tremendous generation who understands the crisis the country faces. They're willing to step forward and do the job and their courage, their team play, is just incredible to behold.¹

AND

We have a Nation of 300 million Americans now. Less than 1 percent of those wear the uniform of any service. Far less than that wear our uniform. But yet, you have stepped up at a time when the Nation is in crisis. You're here because you want to be here. You are volunteers who step forward and take the fight to a very cowardly enemy. We owe you for that. When you, for the rest of your life — whether you stay for three years or you stay for 30 years — when you walk into that pub or that restaurant or that theater, you do so with your head held high because you are America's warrior class. You have

¹ Excerpt from 11 November 2008 interview with CNN's Heidi Collins

CMC Bullets

Version: 20081212

stepped up at a crisis in this Nation's history when they needed for you to do so, and you have chosen to be officers of Marines. God bless you all and we'll see you in the field.²
AND

I chatted with a young Marine in Ramadi and I said, "Why did you join the Marine Corps?" He said, "Well, sir, I'll be honest with you. When I was 11, they attacked the World Towers." He said, "You know, I was scared. I had no idea that our country could be hit that hard." He said, "By the time I got to be 13, I was pissed off about it. And now, I'm 18 and I'm doing something about it."

And I think that's representative of the way a lot of these kids feel. We saw a surge right after 9/11 with those that were of age, but I didn't have an appreciation maybe until recently that there's a residual out there in some of the younger kids as well. So anyway, recruiting is going very well. I'm proud to say, we get great Marines out of Chicago and lots of other places around the states with our guys, the recruiting establishment in general.³

Current Operations

The Sergeant Major and I never speak to an audience without talking about our number-one priority, which is our troops in combat. We just recently returned from the theater, Iraq and Afghanistan in August, and I've got to tell you, folks, it's too early to run up the victory pennant in Iraq, but things are looking better there than anybody ever would have believed at his point in time.

I left there in the fall of '04. It was the deadly, the volatile al Anbar province. Today, it is, in many ways, the model for what's taking place in the rest of the country. The commanders out of Baghdad come see our commanders and say, you're a couple of years ahead of everybody else. How are you doing this?

Well, the fact is we owe credit to rotation after rotation of Marines and sailors and the soldiers who support us in the province all the time, and some of them are in the room here this morning, I might add. It is a constant theme that has been heard. There's the patience, perseverance, trigger control, all those things that have caused the Sunni leadership out west in the Anbar province to eventually come to our people and say, you're not the enemy. We thought you were. It's the al Qaeda. And if you will join with us, we will slaughter those people – their term.

That's essentially what's been happening out there since the fall of '06. General John Kelly, who's out there right now in charge of our troops, would say that his kinetic efforts

² Excerpt from 2 October 2008 speech at Mess Night, Company C, BOC 3-08, TBS, Quantico

³ Excerpt from address to the participants in the 24 October 2008 Marine Corps Business Executive Forum

CMC Bullets

Version: 20081212

are about 5 percent now of what he does. The rest of it has to do with politics and economics and making sure that the Sunnis were able to enjoy the welfare of the country as it continues to improve. So a pretty good news story right now out of Iraq. You can still get hurt there, and we lost a corporal here I guess about a week ago now. So you can still get hurt in Iraq, but it's not nearly the dangerous and volatile place, again, that it was over the past few years.

Afghanistan is not such an encouraging story, but the trends lines on casualties and attacks are down in Iraq and up in Afghanistan and, frankly, I think our Nation is going to be there for a while. You've got drugs in the south that is fueling the insurgency with resources. You've got safe heaven nearby, and we're going to be in that fight for some time to come.

We've got Marine units that are there. The 24th MEU did a great job as a Marine Air-Ground Task Force. They're coming back home to the East Coast as we speak. The Second Battalion, Seventh Marines was put along the rat lines that connect up to the drug dealers and the safe haven. They've done a great job. They've taken a number of casualties in the battalion, but they're also coming home to the desert now at Twentynine Palms.

We're putting what we call a special Marine Air-Ground Task Force in to replace 2/7, but I'll tell you, ladies and gentlemen, it hurts, because your Corps has been in what we call one-to-one deployment to dwell for a long time now. That means redeployed for seven months. Our young Marines and sailors are home for seven months, in some cases, not even that. In some cases, it's only five months depending upon the MOS.

At the time that the secretary [of defense] made that decision with regards to 24th MEU and 2/7, I sat at the meeting and explained to the secretary, sir, we're going to have to draw a red line here. If you want more forces in Afghanistan, if you want more Marines in those mountains, we can do that, and we probably should, but the fact is we can't do both. We can't have a foot in both camps. We're just not big enough. So if you want more forces in Afghanistan, they must come from Iraq and you must be willing to accept the risk, if you want to call it that, that those forces simply can't go there, if you want them to go to Afghanistan. He's got that.

3/8 was headed to Iraq. We anticipated what was going to happen and we trained them well and we're satisfied they're going to do well, and we really anticipate there will be more Marines there [Afghanistan] come springtime in order to start taking care of business for once and for all in Afghanistan, and arguably, Pakistan.⁴

⁴ Excerpt from 19 November 2008 CMC address to the San Diego Military Advisory Council

CMC Bullets

Version: 20081212

The Long War

You folks are going to go to war. Okay, don't let there be any doubt in your mind at this point as you undergo your training. Pay attention to what's taking place here. You'll be paying increased attention, I think, when you get to Quantico and even beyond that at your MOS [military occupational specialty] producing schools.

There is no doubt in my mind that this is a long war. I think that Iraq and Afghanistan are the first battles of that war, but there are many more battles, probably in places that we don't know about yet, where these people are going to go. It's like putting your thumb on Jell-O. We're going to squeeze them out, we're not going to kill them all; they're going to someplace else, and we're going to have to go there because otherwise they will be there planning attacks on the United States. That's their strategy. So we have to absolutely crush this movement to the extent that we can then allow the moderates in the religion to once again take charge. That's how you eventually terminate this thing. The reasonable people in this religion say, "We've had it to here with these guys, and we're going to stop this, we're going to stop the extremism and get a level of control on it because it is not conducive to our families and to raising children."

That's what we face and that's what you face in particular in the months and years to come. I think you're going to be very comfortable with that. The training that you are going to get is going to prepare you in ways that at this point you can't imagine. But it's going to be very tough training. It's going to be goal-oriented training; it's going to be mission accomplishment type of training. You're going to be going at it with some of the same people that are alongside you right now but with hundreds of other young Americans who also want to step forward and fight for their country. So it's very rewarding certainly in that regard. Being a Marine is very rewarding.⁵

Transition

MR. DREAZEN (*Wall Street Journal*): I assume [in Afghanistan], and this is what I wanted to ask you about, that this'll mean next year those numbers will come up again?

GEN. CONWAY: Well, it depends. You know, if you read everything that President-elect Obama said in his candidacy, I think that's his intent, his direction. If you accept what's happening with Iraq will continue apace and we can draw down there, then we believe, I think as an institution, that we need to put more force in there [Afghanistan]. General McKiernan, who goes back with us a long way, back to 2003, is asking for more force. I think all those things are going to come together in '09, you know. It just remains to be seen.

⁵ CMC address to NROTC midshipmen at Texas A&M on 17 October 2008

CMC Bullets

Version: 20081212

MR. DREAZEN: I think the really interesting comments coming out of the Marines who are out in Anbar, talking about how the gain seemed to have – they're stable, it seems to be continuing if anything, further improving rather than diminishing.

MR. DREAZEN: How does that affect the thinking for you and for the rest of the chiefs about the pace and the scale of the drawdown out of Iraq?

GEN. CONWAY: Well, I won't speak for the rest of the chiefs, but I'll say that in my view, we still have in excess of 20,000 Marines there with only – in the words of the commander, with only about 5 percent of their efforts being kinetic in nature. That translates to the fact that we're doing a good bit of nation-building in the West. I know for a fact that the commander feels like he could do that with less force. And less force in a very real way encourages the Iraqis to do more. He's characterized it in some ways as getting out of their way and having what he needs, certainly for strategic over-watch but not excessive numbers of troops that would cause them to perhaps to be looking for something to do. We think that's a positive thing, I mean that sort of smells like victory and that's a good thing.

MR. DREAZEN: I was telling your colleagues, I ran into an old friend yesterday who had just come back from his second tour in Fallujah. The first '05/'06, this one just now, and he was saying how he didn't fire his gun a single time.

GEN. CONWAY: We have battalions coming back with no casualties. I think that connotes very much the nation-building role that we're in. You know, last time I was there, we got on a vehicle at Camp Fallujah, drove down the middle of Fallujah, drove down the Highway of Death past Habbinyah, and we drove down the middle of Ramadi and met with a number of Iraqi leadership, the security forces leadership, at Blue Diamond, the old headquarters there. It was a very collegial meeting. They said, "We love you guys, stay as long as you want to, but in the meantime, understand, we got it. Okay, there's nothing here that we can't manage."

I think that's the prevailing attitude and we want to prosper that attitude. Give them whatever plugs they need to be able to continue to build capacity. And I think they're serious about it, and I think they're seriously capable. If you look at what the prime minister has done in Iraq, he has moved around his brigades, those brigades that were trained out West, to various places in the country to serve as a quick response force. And they've done quite well. They've really turned the tide when they arrived so we're feeling pretty good about that. Certainly those that have stayed back are, we think, more than capable of handling what might arise in the Anbar.

MR. DREAZEN: Do you have a sense of the 20,000 Marines who are there now how many might still need to be there, let's say, mid-point of 2009 or end of 2009?

CMC Bullets

Version: 20081212

GEN. CONWAY: It'd be hard to put a number on it. I do know that our logisticians have told us that if someone threw the switch tomorrow and decided Marines would leave Iraq; it would still take eight to 10 months to move out all the equipment. A drawdown is necessarily going to be something that consumes a certain amount of time. How many maneuver battalions or combat forces would be needed in that period of time – hard to say. I would say, probably though, something along the lines of a regiment minus a couple of battalions and maybe some support battalions, you know, like recon or AAVs maybe LAR.

I'm what is called a Title X guy; I don't make those kinds of decisions anymore. The commanders on the ground make those decisions. We do have the issue of our MTTs or our military training teams. And it's our view that when we do leave, they need to come with us. By and large, that function would need to be assumed by somebody in the theatre, who could support them. Otherwise, as Marines, we're going to want to support Marines in their functions, and I just don't think over the long haul we're going to have that kind of capacity in the country to do that. My point is when we make a break, we want it to be a clean break and not have Marines strewn all over the countryside doing various things.

MR. DREAZEN: When you talk about making a clean break, does that hold true on the other side of the spectrum? If you start moving more Marines to Afghanistan, would you want that to be more a comprehensive shift as opposed to piecemeal?

GEN. CONWAY: Well, that's exactly right. The reason for that is that we're too small to do otherwise. You know the shortfall for us has always been combat service support, commonly known as enablers, but we don't have enough enablers to be in both places. So we have cautioned our leadership against trying to stretch us that thin. We are already something now better than one to one deployment to dwell. We're not at one to two, but we're better than one to one. That said, some of our communities still feel a good bit of stress, and those are the communities – the engineers, the intelligence guys, the motor transport, the MPs – those are the people we don't have enough of to be in both places. So part of our logic with this clean break is the ability to ship those forces that we need to support the combat formations to a single location.

MR. DREAZEN: That plan, which I know has been talked about both by you and by others before, is that getting a new hearing again?

GEN. CONWAY: Well, I guess it's too strong to say it's a new hearing. I think people understand though, again, the combination of things. The veteran conditions in Iraq – President-elect Obama likely to change the priorities from Iraq to Afghanistan. Now, the request by General McKiernan for as many as 20,000 troops in formal RFFs, the worsening conditions in Afghanistan; and I think in all of that we see a national threat to a degree that we can't ignore. I don't think there's anybody in Iraq these days planning a strike on the United States. I fear there are people in Afghanistan or Pakistan who could

CMC Bullets

Version: 20081212

be doing that very thing. So the sooner we crush that movement and allow a level of normalcy back into the religion so that it's managed by the moderates, the sooner, I think, that threat disappears.⁶

Stress on the Force

We've been at it a long time. The deployments are seven months gone and seven months home. We've been able to keep that as our mainstay. I offer that to you sort of in contrast to what the Army has evolved to do. They started out at 12 [months], and at one point, they had to move to 15 [months] just to be able to satisfy all the requirements, and I tell you, that was really hard on the soldiers.

We've been able to maintain seven [month deployments], and it took some doing inside this building. My predecessor had to go to the secretary of defense a couple or two or three times to explain to him the value of seven [month deployments], and the fact that a new unit there was able to maintain a relationship with the Iraqis in particular – that there wasn't a spike in casualties when a new unit came in who were not familiar with the ground. The good news is every battalion we send back has probably got about 40 percent who are combat vets. We bring on new Marines and we get the seasoning that goes with experienced hands and that's really a pretty good thing.

The other thing that's helped us, though, is that we also will rotate people out after about three or four years in the operating forces and we send them to what we call "B-billets." Some of them are in Chicago recruiting. They're here at our headquarters or at Quantico, or they're doing a whole host of things for about three years where essentially they're sleeping in their own rack and they're with their families and they're not deployed. When they come back then, they're rested; they're pretty refreshed by that point in time, and they're ready to get back into the fight – sometimes more so than their families are, but they're Marines and there's a reason we join the Corps.

If you do the math, with an Army unit once again, and you read that a soldier has deployed three different times, that's about six years or seven years. He's there for a year at a time. He's home for a year before he has to go back. So they're in their operating force units for a lot longer than we are, and I think, again, that's probably going to be wearing over time as this long war continues.

So [General] George Casey and I have had that conversation. I think he's looking at ways to mitigate that and we certainly wish him success in that, because the Marine Corps wins battles. The Army wins wars. We're a part of this, but a comparatively small part. So the health of the United States Army is a concern, I think, for us all.

⁶ 25 November 2008 CMC interview with *Wall Street Journal*. Article appeared in 26 November 2008 issue of the *Wall Street Journal*.

CMC Bullets

Version: 20081212

The good news coming out of all of this, I think, for us is the resiliency of our Marines. I would say myself, I am finding it incredible. We track about a dozen indicators each month — metrics, if you will — to determine health of the force, the tone of the force, and again, it's almost eye-watering, with the exception of suicides, which seems to be up — I mean, it's sort of a national phenomena. It's up for us the last couple of years and a slight trend upward in divorce. All the other indicators that you might look at and that would give you some cause for concern — UA rates, desertion rates, drug abuse, alcohol abuse, spousal or child abuse — are all down compared to what they were in 2001.

Our captains — that mid-grade key leadership role for us — the company commanders, if you will — are staying at a rate beyond what they were doing in 2001. 91 percent of our captains are staying with us beyond their initial tour of duty. Again, I just think those are incredible things and it shows that we've got a great young generation of Americans out there that feel very strongly that the country is in a crisis and needs their help and they're staying with us. The resiliency, again, I think is something we've all very proud of.⁷

Our Families

So we are concerned about the force. We are concerned about trying to get a better dwell of about 14 months for every seven months gone, but we're most concerned about the families. We consider that they are the brittle part of the equation. And I won't ask, but I suspect on average about 40 percent of you are married. What we're trying to do is enhance the quality of life for those families so that they want to stay at bases and stations while you're gone. We want to make sure that we've got sufficient numbers of childcare centers, respite time, quality of life, opportunities, activities, all those types of things that will help your spouse to understand that, one, we do care, and secondly, to want to help you to stay Marines. That's our objective. We're spending a lot of money against that compared to what we used to do, but I just want you to know that we understand what you deal with on a daily basis; we're trying to do something about it.⁸

Grow the Force / Recruiting

MR. DREAZEN: A couple of weeks ago, Congressman Murtha on the Hill talked about the growth plan, the end-strength growth plan for the ground forces being now under question because of the budget. What's your level of either confidence that it will still happen or concern that it won't?

GEN. CONWAY: Well, it's going to happen because we're almost there. We're at 100 — we're right at 200,000 right now; our growth target is 202. Our recruiters are recruiting at such a pace that we'll have accomplished that in the first quarter of the new year. In fact, our concern is going past it because we don't have money for anything more than

⁷ Excerpt from 24 October 2008 CMC address to Marine Corps Business Executive Forum

⁸ Excerpt from 20 November 2008 CMC address to Marines and Sailors at MCAS Camp Pendleton

CMC Bullets

Version: 20081212

202,000. So we will reach our growth in about half the time that we projected, frankly, and I think that's a marvelous story that needs to be told.

But the question then becomes, do people want to continue to allow us to have that structure? We think we need it. As stressed as our forces are right now, as much of a benefit as these additional Marines have meant to us, I think we could make a strong case that we do not need to, as soon as we achieve this growth, start downsizing. The country is at war. And we always grow our armed forces during time of war. So it is expensive? Of course it is. Do we need a Marine Corps that's 202,000 if we're in a peacetime scenario? I think that's too big. I think we would want to get back down to something more akin to where we were: 175, 182,000 perhaps for a peacetime Marine Corps. But the Nation is not at peace right now and I think it's a very good guard against what our experts are telling us is out there in the future.

Now, this hybrid warfare that is very ground forces intensive. So I think the country is well-disposed to hang onto this growth, both in the Army and the Marine Corps, for a few years at least.

MR. DREAZEN: How did you manage to do that, to get to that target so quickly?

GEN. CONWAY: Well, a number of things. One, we put additional recruiters in the field. We have some great advertisements that are taking place out there. We think we're targeting it at the right people. There have been some various programs that have allowed us to get at the types of people that we want: a high-school football coach's clinic, for instance, where we are able to advertise and speak to the high-school football coaches from across the country. That's the kind of young man we're looking — or woman that we're looking for.

I also give credit to this generation because it's a great young generation who has seen what has happened now since 9/11. They sense that the country's in jeopardy and they just want to be Marines; they want to go fight for their country. So we have done it in about half the time. The DOD standard for high-school graduates is 90 percent; the Marine Corps standard is 95 percent. We're bringing them in at 96.3 percent high-school graduates; so there's been no diminution of quality along the way, which is, again, I think, somewhat remarkable in that virtually every other instance where you can cite that kind of a rapid growth, there's had to be some deduction of quality which is associated with it.⁹

Long-term Security Concerns

My job, and the job of those great generals who just got introduced along with a whole lot of others, is to look to the future, though. I would offer just a couple of thoughts to

⁹ 25 November 2008 CMC interview with Wall Street Journal

CMC Bullets

Version: 20081212

you folks tonight in terms of what we think that future might look like just so you can do perhaps a long-range plan.

We have a visions group at Quantico that's looking at that period 2020 to 2025; we think that's the sweet spot. What they're telling us is that the world is going to be very different, that demographics are going to change the world as we know it. They're telling us that the world's population is going to blossom but it's going to be in about 75 percent of the case within about 35 miles of a sea coast, which really talks to the importance of the Navy-Marine team.

They tell us that oil is going to continue to be the thing that greases our machines. It will be critically important to us, but they also tell us that water will be as important as oil and that nations will flat go to war in order to be able to have a freshwater drinking supply for their people.

They tell us that the United States will still be important by then, but it will be a much more multi-polar world. And we're going to have to learn to live with a resurgent Russia, an empowered China and India and a collective European Union. We're going to have to be less predominant perhaps then we have been in the last couple of decades.

Maybe most importantly, they tell us that although we could see the rise of a near competitor, what we're probably going to see is what we saw for instance in 2006 with the Israeli dust-up. That is hybrid conflict — powerful non-state actors with fourth- and fifth-generation systems that can knock out an entire tank battalion if you give them the chance and you're not prepared to take them on.

So those are the threats that we see. That's the Corps we're building. We think it needs to be a two-fisted force, able to engage in that hybrid conflict with expertise but also able to do the high-end things should the country need that kind of a defense. That points us, I think, towards maybe three areas where we can continue to use your help.

The first, of course, is troop protection. And, again, I think we've done that very, very well. You look at the MRAP as perhaps the classic example of the country, the government, the military, and industry all coming together to provide the best for our troops — whatever it took.

I continue to prime the pump every time I meet with one of you folks and I say, "Build me a helmet that will stop 7.62, okay?" It's out there somewhere. We know it is. The threat is such that we're going to continue to have a need for that. But it talks to the fact that we need first-class lightweight protection for our troops wherever we go. We also need to enhance our lethality. They tell us that on this hybrid battlefield, what we're likely to see is a situation where, analogous to if you're on a football team and your bus arrives at the stadium to play, you don't play on the grassy field; you play the game in the parking lot and it's a whole different game. You've got to be precise and you've

CMC Bullets

Version: 20081212

got to be lethal. Once again, you've got to be able to protect your troops against high-energy weapons at close range.

All that stuff has got to be light. You know, we've become a second land army in a very real sense in Iraq. We don't like that, but we've always said we do windows, right, so that's where we find ourselves today.¹⁰

Value to the Nation

We have a tremendous joint force today. We like operating as a joint capability; there's synergy, there's power in that. And each Service does it in his own way. I won't talk about how the other Services do it, I'm mostly familiar with my own, but I will discuss how we as the Marine Corps approach that. We consider ourselves to be a force in readiness. Our guidance in the law is to be "most ready when the nation is least ready" to do what has to be done. We look on the fact that right now we are pretty good at counterinsurgency; we're doing those things that must be done in both Iraq and Afghanistan and yet there's another level of requirement out there that we could see that involves major contingency operations. So we say that we must be balanced in our approach. We can't be all war and all the other because, for obvious reasons, you're not as prepared as you should be, should that surprise emerge.

We call it being a two-fisted fighter equally able to go either way. And that's the way we're attempting to develop the force. Then we got some problems doing that; as committed as we are today it is tough, but we know where we need to get to, we know what we want for the Nation, we know what our niche is and we're anxious to get there. We see that our Corps in its role has tremendous **value to the nation**. It is, in a phrase, "lean and mean". We are appropriated about 6 percent of the national Department of Defense budget. For that 6 percent we provide 24 percent of the maneuver battalions; about 15 percent of the fixed-wing aircraft — attack aircraft, if you will; about 19 percent of the attack helicopters.¹¹

Expeditionary Force / Naval Character

I think that we've got a pretty good story. And this is what it is. It's got everything to do with expeditionary. In recent years, we've had some pretty fat years with the Corps where DoD budgets are concerned. You've seen it; I've seen it, too.

I saw something the other day that came out that said — and this was out of CENTCOM — that "the infrastructure must be created in Afghanistan before the combat troops can be deployed." I'll say that again: "The infrastructure must be built before combat troops

¹⁰ Excerpt from 1 October 2008 speech at Modern Day Marine Expo banquet, Pentagon City, VA

¹¹ Excerpt from 5 December 2008 speech at the Institute of World Politics - Annual Pearl Harbor Day Commemoration Dinner in the Mayflower Hotel, Washington, DC.

CMC Bullets

Version: 20081212

can be introduced.” Now, my dad was a soldier in World War II. He was in the 45th Infantry Division across Salerno and Anzio. I think he would immediately roll over in his grave to think that that’s where we are today.

That’s somewhat the attitude, but that’s not our attitude. We spoke to President Bush last week and the president asked one of them [other service chief], “What is expeditionary? Define it.” When it came my turn to talk, I said, “Mr. President, here’s the Marine version of expeditionary: Expeditionary equals fast, austere and lethal.” And I said, “by the way, sir, emphasis on the austere – we think we do that better than anybody.” He said, “That’s because you’re the Marines.” And we went on to the next briefing.¹²

AND

We need to regain our naval expeditionary flavor. We’ve gotten away from that. We still float MEUs — but less than we did, and we spend much less time at sea in those gray-hulled ships that we call amphib. Yet we think that’s what we offer that is unique to the Nation. So we’ve got to get back to doing that, and, right now, frankly, we simply have had to take a rain check. We don’t have the force structure to do all those things that the combatant commanders would have us do aboard those ships, but we want to. We see the need for them, and we see that it’s our particular niche, again, in terms of the country’s defense structure.¹³

That leads to the next point, and that is the challenge to stay expeditionary. There are a lot of people laying claim to that capability these days — hanging their hat on that rack. I guess that’s okay when budgets are fairly lavish and you can afford to, as a Nation, have all of your forces try to move to being expeditionary. But my definition of expeditionary — in conjunction with our brothers in the Navy — is fast, austere, and lethal.

Not everybody can make that claim — even though they might say that they consider themselves expeditionary. We consider that this Navy-Marine Corps-Coast Guard team is truly the expeditionary capability of this great Nation. And that there may come a time when the Nation cannot afford to have everybody lay claim to that — with the readiness requirement of forces that it is associated with. So it’s a challenge for us, I think, to carve that out and understand where we are, who we are, and resource it appropriately.¹⁴

Maritime Strategy

I’d like to do what the organizers have asked me to do, and that is talk about my Marine Corps first of all, but I’d like to give you just a couple of thoughts, if I can, on how I see

¹² Excerpt from CMC address to commanders at the 21 October 2008 Commanders Course, Quantico, VA

¹³ Excerpt from 28 October 2008 CMC address to the Navy New Flag Officer and SES Symposium, Potomac, MD

¹⁴ Excerpt from 28 October 2008 CMC address to the Navy New Flag Officer and SES Symposium, Potomac, MD

CMC Bullets

Version: 20081212

this maritime strategy and what it means to our Corps. First of all, we are a maritime nation, and I think there is some concern on the part of the Navy, and I'll certainly say in the Marine Corps, that we not forget that our strength, our commerce, so much of what we depend on a daily basis comes across those seas out there. Your Navy in particular these days is out there securing these sea lines of communication so that we can enjoy the quality of life that we have. We should not take it for granted, and there is cost associated with it. I think that's something that again, the CNO in particular would ask that you understand.

I believe – and I know it is a part of the national philosophy – that our Nation is best defended by forward presence, by our existence elsewhere, so that no threat reaches our shores. If we're going to have a fight, we'd rather it be someplace else other than our east or west coast of these United States. That forward presence out there, conducted by Navy ships and Marines embarked, and now the Coast Guard, I think is a very positive thing. It lends itself to what we call engagement, and that's something I think that's a little different about this concept, this strategy.

When you go to a meeting these days with the combatant commanders and the service chiefs, you hear a lot of discussion about engagement with developing nations, in an effort to preclude combat taking place there at a later point in time. We're trying to do things with these nations that will increase their quality of life — that will increase the capabilities of their security forces. We're trying to make sure that fundamentalism or extremism is simply not a tactic, and in the process perhaps we'll avoid some of the situations that we see at work right now in Iraq and Afghanistan.

It's not just military engagement. Increasingly we believe, and we have said such to the president in a tank session, that there needs to be engagement through all elements of Americans abroad. The entire interagency of the United States government needs to join with us with these developing nations to give them their insights and their assistance as may be needed. They are much more capable in certain dimensions than we are, and so we want to partner with those people, have them create an expeditionary capability to join us out there so that, again, the fundamental needs of some of these developing nations can be met.

Lastly, it's my belief that our Nation enjoys working with partner nations. We almost enjoy a coalition when we want to do something. Now there's an old Russian toast that says, "May all your enemies be coalitions." So there's jeopardy in coalitions, I think we'll have to admit that. But the fact is that we like being partnered with other nations, and that certainly includes the high seas. Some of the people who are critical of the strategy have said, "General, does that mean that we will have to have a vote, a collective vote before we go through something on behalf of this great Nation?" The answer, of course, is, absolutely no. If it is in our Nation's vital interest, we, the Marine Corps and Navy and Coast Guard, are going to do what has to be done. We're not going to ask for a vote.

CMC Bullets

Version: 20081212

In the meantime, I think it is helpful if we can be with these other nations, projecting our capabilities when and where they may be needed. So that's just a couple of bullets, if I can, on what you may have heard elements of this morning, and my description to you of this thing on maritime strategy.¹⁵

Seabasing

We're keenly interested in the concept of Seabasing. We are now developing a concept that will allow ships to literally mate at sea, using a series of inter-connector vessels that will serve essentially as a port and an airfield — using the sea as maneuver space where nations do not desire U.S. forces ashore, where we choose to minimize our footprint ashore for any combination of reasons, simply for the over-the-horizon kind of capacity that it gives the Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard team. We see that as very exciting, and we continue to develop and experiment and I would offer the day is not far away where that kind of capability will exist not only by U.S. forces but potentially by other nations' forces as well.

AND

Let me talk quickly about Seabasing. You have Seabasing, the verb, and Seabasing, the noun. We have been doing Seabasing for a long time. A Marine Expeditionary Unit operates from a seabase. It's not intended to go ashore, but it certainly has that capacity. We find our strength and our support from the bowels of the ships.

What we're talking about with a new paradigm in Seabasing is the idea that we can establish a joint port and airfield at sea that would allow for follow-on forces, allow for combined forces, allow for whatever we thought we needed to move ashore, either in a lethal environment or in a humanitarian environment.

It actually involves a program of 14 ships that can interlock at sea; that we hope would involve the arrival of Army fast sealift ships that connect to this platform and offload on to interconnectors or lighterage that would take us ashore. We see tremendous usage as the program comes to life. If there's one thing that we see in the Marine Corps that may be seen as transformational for us, it's probably Seabasing.

MV-22 Osprey

We have some great gear out there that is working very well. We are now at our tail end of our second deployment of the Osprey in Iraq. And it's doing marvelous things; it

¹⁵ Excerpt from 18 September 2008 "Conversations with the Country" Speech, Durham, NC

CMC Bullets

Version: 20081212

really is. It's adding the dimension to us that we just have not had before. Time, age, and conditions are catching up with the CH-46 squadrons. We have 46's in Afghanistan that at that altitude and in that heat carrying five or six combat-loaded Marines and that's just not enough; that just won't work for us.

So it's time for the aircraft [CH-46] to be phased out. It's time for Osprey — and the Osprey is really turning heads. When I step on board that helicopter, I watch the crew chief. If he's happy, I'm happy, okay. The crew chiefs on Ospreys all have big smiles, and the Marines that have had the opportunity to go on Osprey walk off saying, wow, that's an "e-ticket" ride. So it's a great airplane; it's going to do wonderful things for us.¹⁶

EFV

We've got programs out there that we're going to have to see, I think, protected — if that's the right word — as we continue to go. I think we all agree that we have fat years and lean years; we're probably in for some lean years, and we may have to prioritize. But there are some things that we think are absolutely and vitally important. One of those is our Expeditionary Fighting Vehicle.

We fully accept that the Navy's ships are not going to go closer than 25 miles to another nation's shore for reasons that have to do with the security of the ships and the safety of the Marines and Sailors aboard. Recognizing that, we think we've got to find a way to get onto land and right now, our AAVs are just too slow and too vulnerable in order to be able to do that.

We have been developing for some time what's called the Expeditionary Fighting Vehicle that actually is a sea-skimmer in a sort of way — it gets up on plane at about 30 knots or so and gets us to where we need to go pretty quickly. The program has had its problems — had its issues. It is, technically I think, pushing the envelope in terms of the engineering capacity to build it, but we consider that it is absolutely vital, again, as we tie all this capability together.¹⁷

¹⁶ Excerpt from 17 November 2008 CMC address to Marines stationed at Twentynine Palms

¹⁷ Excerpt from 28 October 2008 CMC address to the Navy New Flag Officer and SES Symposium, Potomac, MD